

Dear People Whom God Loves,

MERCY

Mercy is love reaching out to heal the physical, spiritual or mental suffering of people. We might call it love in action.

The scriptures tell us "God is love." I think we could also say God is mercy, because God is love in action. How can I say this? Look at Jesus. Jesus is human like us and at the same time Jesus is God. Jesus is human and divine. We can't fully understand this, but we have enough of a hint of what it is to allow ourselves to be guided and transformed by it. God will do the transforming and will help us be open to receiving the transformation.

God sees the misery in the life of us humans, much of which is caused by our own sins as well as by the multitude of sins by countless humans.

God sees the misery and pain. So God enters into the man Jesus. This is the incarnation that we celebrate every Christmas. In this way God shares the misery and pain of us humans and brings healing to our misery including the misery of sin. This is what we call salvation. This is why we call Jesus Savior and we call God Savior.

We see Jesus living this out in his words and deeds. He repeatedly spoke of the reign of God, the Heavenly Father who is merciful and forgiving. Jesus forgave sins. He not only healed sins, he also healed physical and mental illness. He lived through the trials and suffering that we humans face, finally ending in his terrible scourging and death by crucifixion. He bore the pain of hopelessness, rejection, despair and all the pain caused by the centuries of sin, though he never sinned himself. This is symbolized in the creed by the phrase, "He descended into hell."

He rose from the dead, telling us that the merciful love of his Heavenly Father is deeper and stronger than human evil. This gives us hope because his Heavenly Father is our Heavenly Father too. This is why when he taught his disciples to pray, he taught them to say "Our Father who art in heaven." And, this is why I believe we can say not only that God is love and love is God's name, but we can also say that God is mercy and mercy is God's name.

II.

In our tradition, we, long ago, were shown some specific ways of putting mercy into practice. These are called the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. I will comment on these and show that they can still be applied even though the world has changed since they were first formed.

Corporal works of Mercy:

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Shelter the homeless
5. Visit the sick
6. Ransom captives
7. Bury the dead

The first four deal with meeting the basic bodily needs that every human person has a right to, and they outline opportunities for individuals to help meet these needs. We can donate (goods or money) to various food and clothing drives and institutions that provide these services. We can also give our time and knowledge to these efforts and in addition, can give our time, knowledge, efforts, and money to groups that provide housing to people of limited means.

All of these efforts are valuable and necessary. They remedy to some degree the harm caused by social structures that serve some people and leave many people wanting.

We have looked at our call to be charitable people. Now we will turn to social justice by asking questions about why some people have so much and so many have little or nothing. Though this doesn't mean everyone should have approximately the same, I think it does require that we ask why our economic systems lead to this inequity.

I also think it is important to be careful about blaming the victims. It is true that some people are more talented and ambitious than others. This does make a difference, but we should not use it to avoid asking the deeper questions.

There are other questions to ask. For example, if children are homeless and hungry most of the time, how much will they be able to dream? How much of their talent will be developed? Will their potential be able to come to fruition?

We are all greatly influenced by the culture in which we live. That culture is vastly different for people. We see things through the eyes of that culture. That vision

strongly tends to blind us to the state of people living in quite different situations. I don't think that we have this blind spot because we are bad people. We are comfortable in our favored state and we don't want anything to change that. It is so easy for us to rationalize. I must admit that I am just as subject to rationalizing as anyone else, but that blindness can keep us from doing some good things we should be doing and can at times cause us to do some bad things we should not be doing.

Though we will never have a perfect or near perfect society, I do think that we have the capacity to make changes and have a more fair society.

I know that what I have written is just easy words. Growing into a more fair society is a difficult process. I know, however, that if one football team always had to start at their own one-yard line and the other team at mid-field, we would rise up and shout that this is unfair. We would demand change. We must admit that the present economic system is unfair. If we admit that and keep asking questions, we will find a way, because underneath (though at times buried deep) we are all good.

Visit the sick: This falls mostly on the family and others who are close to the person who is sick. It is valuable to become aware of what is helpful to the sick person and what is not. We cannot assume that we know what is important to the sick person. We must be open to hear what they need.

On the social level, in a country as affluent as ours, everyone should have access to health care. I think almost all people of good will would agree that this is a goal that fits the values of our country. Though there are various ideas about how to achieve this, I think that if we all agree that we want to achieve this goal before we start debating about how to do it, we will eliminate some of the political games. We can then look at the various options more unselfishly and we are then less likely to see others as enemies. It is so easy for us to see ourselves as principled when it is mostly narrowness and stubbornness. I understand this because I see it in myself.

I find that if we look at different approaches and values honestly and long enough, we will find a deeper solution that protects the values of each side precisely because it is deeper.

Ransom captives: We might think that the time of slavery is over. It is not over. It has just gone underground for most of us. There are children in other countries who are truly slaves making products that are sold in our country. We benefit by paying lower prices and some people make a fortune.

Some girls and boys are captured into the sex slave trade and it shatters their sense of self and worth.

I don't pretend to know how to solve these problems. I do believe that the more that we bring these atrocities to light, the more we will move toward their elimination. Can we imagine what we would feel if the little and young ones we love were subject to this awful existence?

Bury the dead: Burying the dead has a long history in our human race. It was a way of recognizing and dealing with the loss of a loved one. It also at times was joined to the hope of somehow and someday being united again.

For a long time our church was against cremation. Though there never was anything wrong with cremation, the concern was that in the minds of some people cremation was chosen as a symbol of their belief that there is no life after death. Our church, not wanting to spread that belief, told her members not to be cremated. Now that connection has gradually faded away and this is why cremation and burial of the body are seen as equally acceptable.

When someone is deep in grief from the loss of a loved one, we understandably are not sure about how to act or what to say.

The worst thing that we can do is to try to cheer them up.

What they need is our presence and our love. That presence may take somewhat different forms depending on our relationship with the grieving person.

Our communication is not just with words but with the compassion that allows their pain to become ours. Maybe we touch their hand or put an arm around their shoulder. Maybe we hug and cry together. It just depends. Perhaps at the end we might say something like, "I'm always here for you." It depends.

I remember at a grief workshop many years ago a man who had lost a child said "all talk is dumb."

There may be things we can offer for the people who are grieving, like food, rides, etc. Just be gentle.

If we listen to what Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel, it seems clear that mercy (which is love in action to relieve suffering) is at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Being a Christian means following Jesus. There are many valuable practices and rituals in our church. I believe that unless we are growing in mercy, going through these practices and rituals remains rather superficial.

I also think, that too often, we church leaders get so focused on practices and rituals that we don't grow in mercy and don't help others become more merciful.

Mt. 25: 35-45. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.... Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine you did for me.... For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.... Amen I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones you did not do for me."

III.

Spiritual Works of Mercy:

1. Instruct the ignorant
2. Counsel the doubtful
3. Comfort the sorrowing
4. Admonish the sinner
5. Gladly forgive injuries
6. Bear wrongs patiently
7. Pray for the living and the dead

We must be careful with some of these spiritual works of mercy. They may be used as a means to inflate our ego needs and actually hurt people as we blindly tell ourselves that we are being of help. Also, some may lead us to a superficial healing that makes things worse.

Instruct the Ignorant: Before we start instructing people we must be aware that we don't know everything. Also we must listen so we understand what knowledge the person is looking for. We must also be aware of our own feelings of superiority so that we don't make the person feel inferior and must also ask ourselves whether or not what we are about to say will actually be helpful. We must encourage the person to tell us

how they feel about our conversation and when we seem not to be being helpful, we must look for a different way to express ourselves. It is important to be aware that we are likely speaking from just our perspective and that we must tap into what their experience is or has been. We must ask ourselves: are we trying to look very knowledgeable, or are we trying to help them grow. If we are not humble, our chances of being helpful are quite small. Finally, I ask myself: how humble am I as I write this?

Counsel the doubtful: I think it is helpful to realize that we humans never have the whole truth. Only God sees it all. We try to find the right path as best we can and this will often include seeking advice. We humans will always make some mistakes, but our role is to learn from them. Wisdom comes from learning from many mistakes. I am learning that when I am most certain that I have the whole truth, it means that I am quite ignorant. I have my little version of a piece of the truth and think it is the Truth. The problem then is that those who do not agree with me are seen as enemies and I have no need to listen to them. I fight but I don't grow. I must trust that God knows and deeply understands our human frailty and loves us with all our flaws.

Comfort the sorrowing: This would be largely the same as what I wrote under burying the dead. What I see is that we will be able to do this well only to the degree that we are able to see the other person as human like us and we feel their pain within our own soul. This enables a wordless communication that shares the sorrow and says I am with you. You are not alone.

Admonish the sinner: This is perhaps the most dangerous of all the spiritual works of mercy. It is so easy to be like the Pharisees that interacted with Jesus in the Gospel. I am thinking of the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple to pray. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke the prayer to himself, "O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity – greedy, dishonest, adulterous – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income." But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, "O God be merciful to me a sinner." I tell you, the latter went home justified not the former. Lk 18: 11-14a

I remember Fr. Richard Rohr writing: "Religion is a wonderful place to avoid God." This means to me that when we pride ourselves as being holy because we obey all the rules, we can fall into the trap of not realizing our need for God's mercy and not being merciful to those we see as not being as holy as we are.

I look back at a time in my life when I was proud of being humble. When I look back at that, all I can do is laugh. It is so utterly ridiculous.

I see "admonish" as a poor word to use here. I think the urge to admonish can lead us into pride and a feeling of superiority. Perhaps my outward actions are more morally correct than another. That may mean that I am not so caught in sins of the flesh but caught up in sins of the spirit which are much more dangerous and tricky. Practicing religion can lead to spiritual sin.

I must constantly ask God to help me be aware of my need for mercy and ask myself if I am being merciful. I think there are times that we church leaders tell people to get their act together and then we will accept them. When we realize that we are all sinners in need of mercy, we will not tell people to be good, but rather by understanding, we will compassionately love them into growing better. I see Jesus loving people into goodness. I think this is the only way it works and this takes place only by the grace of God.

I think the goal is to help people see that there is a better way of living that has a different type of attractiveness and to convince them that they have the ability to move in that direction. They have that ability because deep inside every one of us is the goodness that is the presence of God (LOVE) (MERCY) though that presence may be deeply covered over, and at the moment impossible for them to see. Change will not be possible by will power alone. Our part, they need to understand, is to be at least a little willing to let (mercy) activate that deep goodness to slowly and painfully transform us all into more merciful people and to keep remembering that (LOVE) (MERCY) is holding us all in her merciful arms.

I have been writing about a process when we are caught deeply in a self-centered and inflated and egotistical trap. There are a few exceptions, but this process is usually slow and difficult. There are many degrees to the depth of this trap and so some journeys are more difficult than others. But remember that (LOVE) (MERCY) is totally with us no matter what our journey is like. God is mercy, mercy, and more mercy. (MERCY) will stick with us.

And for those of us who are doing the "admonishing" remember that we are also on the journey. Let's pray that (MERCY) will help us be aware when "admonishing" is our sinful path.

Jesus used different tactics when dealing with individual sinners and structural sin. With individual sinners he was understanding and compassionate. He helped them to see their ability to find a new way of living. Many, who are part of the sinful structures, are in difficult positions. If you protest, you lose your job and can't feed your family. His cleansing of the temple was exposing the sinful structure. He spoke sharply to

some of the temple elite hoping to break through their self-righteousness. If he could crack through their egocentric armor, then there was hope for their conversion.

Gladly forgive injuries: Jesus told us to forgive our enemies. He lived in a society that called people to limit revenge to not hurting your enemy any more seriously than he had hurt you – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

This law was an improvement. I imagine the thinking was that the desire for revenge was so strong in so many humans that forbidding revenge altogether would not be likely to improve matters very much. So, the compromise was that if one man knocked another man's teeth out, it was better than killing him. It was better than leaving a widow and orphan.

I find it helpful to recognize that the Bible records a gradual growth in the Jewish people's understanding that God is a merciful God and that as God's people we are called to grow in mercy.

In the early stages of the biblical story of the Jewish people, we find the understanding that God wants revenge on their enemies. God commands that they slaughter their enemies and wipe out their enemies' men, women, children and animals. God is seen as vengeful and the people believe that they are also to be vengeful.

When God is seen as vengeful, we are drawn to be vengeful and punishing and we often believe that being vengeful and hurtful is good. Indeed when we think of and image God as vengeful (indeed pondering of anything vengeful and destructive) it activates the part of our brain that leads to anger and aggression and dampens the part of our brain that leads to compassion.

This helps us to understand why religion can lead to immoral and very destructive actions.

If we look only at the early stages of the biblical story of the Jewish people, we will badly misunderstand their vision of God and the actions that follow. We need to let go of thinking that the God of the Old Testament is a vengeful God and the God of the New Testament is a merciful God.

We will find much about the mercy of God in the Old Testament books where we find among other merciful wording the beautiful Hebrew word *hesed*. It refers to the gift to us in our misery, sins, suffering and hopelessness, of God's love, presence, forgiveness and mercy. Isaiah reminds us of this. "We now understand that Love is reaching out to people of all religions, those of no religion, those who aren't sure whether God exists and those who deny that God exists."

To paraphrase Jesus' words: As a mother hen protects all of her chicks under her wings so Jesus holds us under his love and compassion. This is a challenge for us because we often can't feel it, we can't prove it. With what we are going through, it seems false. We can only know it through the deeper knowledge we call faith. Even with faith it is usually hard. If we don't have faith, let us be open and at least a little willing to receive it. Even if we don't seem able to be a little willing, I believe that the love and compassion that God is, will find a way to hold us.

Besides Isaiah we can look at other books of Hebrew scripture (Old Testament) such as Psalms, Hosea, Micah, and Wisdom.

When we look at the later stages of the biblical story, we see God as merciful and forgiving and calling to the people to become more like the God they worship.

Again we tend to become like the way we visualize God. When we ponder God and our image of God is loving, compassionate, and merciful we tend to become more like that. The same thing happens when we ponder any situations of love, compassion and mercy. When we ponder God as loving, compassionate and merciful it activates the part of our brain that fosters compassion and dampens the part of our brain that fosters anger and aggression.

This helps me to understand why religion can lead people to be merciful and compassionate and at times to act heroically.

This brings us to Jesus telling us to love our enemies. Jesus was aware of the Hebrew scripture's teaching of the merciful God of the psalms and prophets. He also had his own mystical experience of his merciful Heavenly Father. Hence it would not seem surprising that he realized the limitations of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It was not enough. This would only keep the cycle of violence going. Only by not striking back could the cycle be broken.

This letting go of our impulse for revenge may seem unnatural or at least like a losing battle because it is so contrary to our ancient urges.

The following helps me to understand. The oldest part of our brain (the brain stem) developed long before humans came on earth. The early instinctive energies that are from the earlier times of evolution were necessary for survival. The limbic system which is a newer part of our brain had not yet been formed. The limbic system is the part of our brain that allows us to have emotions and a degree of bonding. This allows us to have the natural, mutual, emotional attachment between a human and a dog or cat that it is not possible to have between a human and a lizard. At this stage there is

no realization or understanding of right or wrong. Much mayhem can exist, but no sins. Dogs and cats in various degrees can be trained to act in ways that are an improvement for us, but there is no understanding of morality (right or wrong). That is why we don't take dogs and cats to court to be declared guilty or innocent.

The newest part of our brain is the prefrontal cortex. Only we humans have that. This allows us to see the consequences of our choices, to be able to make plans, and to be able to make moral choices about what is morally right or wrong. We can now sin. No other creatures can sin.

These three parts of our brain interact with each other. Influences go all the way up and down.

We become fully human (whole and holy) when all three are working in harmony and directed to good (GOD). This helps me to understand myself and others and to be merciful to myself and others. Mercy includes myself and others pointed to good (GOD). No wonder our human journey is so difficult.

When I see all of these challenges, I am not surprised that when we die we still have a lot of growing to do. I believe in the doctrine of Purgatory. It reminds me that God keeps working with us with the goal of us becoming full, whole and holy humans. I believe that that means that we are called to be as much like God as it is possible to be.

I think that when Jesus called us to forgive our enemies he was telling us how important mercy is on the path of resembling the Mercy that is God.

I would like us now to understand a little better what the path to forgiveness is like. Just a few hints, a more detailed explanation is in my book "Surrounded by Love" (available in the vestibule of St. Stanislaus Church).

1. Forgiveness is not something that happens by will power.
2. Forgiveness is a journey and sometimes a long one.
3. Forgiveness does not mean that what was done to us was okay.
4. Until we receive the grace of forgiveness the person who hurt us will affect our lives. We might say that they still have power over us.
5. We must face the reality that they have caused much difficulty and pain in our life.
6. We must face the anger that we feel and our desire for revenge.
7. We will need help on the journey.

8. While we can't forgive by will power, we can choose to begin the journey. I am not denying that on a rare occasion we might have a transforming experience.
9. Telling someone to be a good Christian and to forgive is worthless. It comes from ignorance.
10. Though we may hate ourselves, God knows our goodness and is loving us and holding us even if we don't know it.
11. Forgiveness doesn't mean that we have to be in any kind of relationship with the one who hurt us. That may happen. It may not. It depends somewhat upon their reaction and whether it is beneficial to us.
12. When the journey of healing is over we are surprised. When did this happen? I'm not angry anymore. They no longer have power over me. I'm grateful. I'm free.

Bear wrongs patiently: I don't know what to write about this that wasn't written about forgiveness except this. Don't take it to mean that we can just move on and put it behind us when there is turmoil inside.

Pray for the living and the dead: This is a reminder to us that we are related to everyone that has ever lived on this world and those who will live here. Of course we have a special relationship with those we know and love. Evolution reminds us that everything in our cosmos is related. Our faith reminds us that the same loving presence of God lives in all of us and that because God has made us her co-worker, our prayer and openness makes more space for that Loving Presence to make each of us more like God.

III

It might seem that mercy and justice cannot be reconciled. How can God be both merciful and just? For example, if you break the law, justice requires that you pay the price. That understanding is, I believe, rather common. I think that we too often have the idea that God rewards us for obeying his laws, (the Ten Commandments) and punishes us for disobeying. If we are obedient, we will be rewarded with heaven. If we are disobedient, we will be punished in hell. If we repent we get another chance. I know that I have expressed this rather crudely, but I believe that it points to a mindset that is quite widespread.

Understandably, it's common to believe that God sees things much as we do. I suggest that this way of thinking does not do justice to the unbounded mercy of God that we find in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the New Testament including the words and deeds of Jesus.

Though it seems to me that associating obedience with rewards and disobedience with punishment is probably the way that we have to start, a limitation of this mindset is that we are not choosing our actions out of love, but rather because we are better off if we get the reward and avoid the punishment.

If I choose to be good to you so that I will be rewarded in heaven or choose not to hurt you so that I will not be punished in hell, it is all about me. When it is all about me, love is not present.

Don't get me wrong. The rewards and punishments can give us a moral foundation. That is good. The problem comes when we get stuck there. We are called to enter the reign of God. That means that we are allowing MERCY to draw us slowly and painfully into being more merciful people. God is love. Mercy is love in action to relieve the pain, suffering, hopelessness, hunger and other things that plague us humans. When we gradually get out of me, me, me, and get into you, you, you, and we, we, we, relieving peoples' pain is our only motivation.

When we love someone deeply and they are in pain, isn't relieving their pain the only motivation we have? Just think of a mommy and daddy with a little one who is hurting.

Jesus invites us to enter the reign of God and as we are drawn into that reign we become more merciful. Big MERCY transforms us into little mercies and through us spreads into more little mercies and on and on.

I see this as the mission that Jesus gave to our church as a community (the Body of Christ) and to us as individuals. I believe that this version of mercy must guide the way our church works, how it is structured, how its laws are made, how the laws are put into practice, and how we treat each other. This version of mercy should guide not only how we treat other churches, but how we treat people of every religion, those who have no religion, those who wonder whether there is a God, and those who deny that there is a God. All people are MERCY'S beloved daughters and sons.

I believe that God has always and will always be this mercy. I believe this when I ponder that God emptied himself and took on in Jesus our humanity with all its joys and sorrows. He took on all our tragedies and sins to heal all that is destructive and to give us hope.

That of course is far from completed now, but Jesus' resurrection gives us hope that it is happening and that it will someday be completed. In the meantime, we are called to trust and hang on. Jesus also told us that he would send the Holy Spirit after he was gone. The Holy Spirit is God being with us and helping us until the end of time. This

gives us hope. I recall recently a definition of church. I think that is was written by Cardinal Walter Kasper. To quote it from memory, "Church is a community of people who have hope that in the end everything will be all right."

I believe that God feels our pain. Jesus felt it as we do in his humanness. Obviously God doesn't feel pain as we do. Our words and experiences are just little hints of what is in God. There is something in God that is like our feeling. At the same time it is not like our feeling and is way beyond what our feeling is.

God is love in action to heal and save us. We are precious to LOVE. LOVE is always working in mysterious ways to heal and save us. That is why I believe that MERCY is who God is.

I see that law and mercy have a different goal in civil society and church. That is because civil society and church have different goals. At the same time civil society and church need both.

I believe that civil society is a community of laws. That is important. The purpose of civil law is to keep the peace, to keep people from hurting each other. Because civil society is made up of so many kinds of people, laws must be primary or there would not be peace. Injustice would be largely rampant. That is why judges must follow the law.

At the same time, because there are so many differences in the individuals who break the law and so many differences in the situations surrounding the individual cases, a judge needs some flexibility in sentencing. I would call this mercy. Indeed, if the variables were not considered, I would say that absolute justice would not really be just.

In civil society, law is first and mercy second. The goal of church is quite different. The goal of churches that follow Jesus (communities that are not Christian can and do have similar goals but it would not be expressed as following Jesus) is to help people enter the reign of God. Entering the reign of God means that we as individuals and as community are gradually able to see the world and people in a way that is more and more close to the way in which God sees them. We are also more and more able to put this God-like vision into practice in our daily lives.

When we listen to the Hebrew prophets and to Jesus, we see that God is MERCY. When we see that God is MERCY, we see that God's response to sin is not to cast us aside and punish us, but to heal us. Why? Because God sees (as we often don't) that when we sin we are hurting ourselves and others. God in a mysterious way feels the

harm that sin is doing. Because God is MERCY, God wants to relieve that pain by helping us to change the path that is causing the pain in ourselves and others. MERCY does not abandon us, but only wants to relieve our pain and bring us more peace. This brings more good into our world.

We might counter by saying that God has to be just. True enough. But consider this. Since God's way is bringing more good than our justice, justice in God is not like what we usually think of as justice. God's justice is so much deeper than ours that God's justice is mercy. God's mercy is justice. It is all the same.

Let's get back to law and mercy, but now in the church. Since our goal as a church is to enter more deeply into the reign of God and by our mercy help others to see the beauty and goodness of the reign of God, our goal is mercy.

Our church is a community of mercy while our civil society is a community of law. At the same time there is a place for law in our church, particularly the Ten Commandments. They help us to realize that mercy doesn't mean that all ways of living are good. Stealing is not a good way to make a living. This means that there is firmness behind mercy even though mercy is primary.

Our church makes laws too. They are not on the same level as the Ten Commandments. They can contain wisdom gained through our long history, but we must also ask the question: do they have the same relevance today that they used to? There are also church laws that are of lesser importance. They may point to what is good. If so and someone is not obeying these laws, is the merciful and good answer to say we don't want you? Perhaps we could be patient and let God work in them. Before we judge too quickly, we must consider that while we may not be breaking any church rules, we may have made our own wrong choices. The Pharisees kept all the religious rules but they had no mercy. They were the ones Jesus had trouble with. I must continually ask myself when I make judgements, is mercy in my heart?

In civil society law is first and mercy second. In church mercy is first and law is second. I don't pretend to know how that applies in a concrete situation. I know these are general statements, but I find them helpful.

These are questions I keep asking myself:

1. Does everyone have the same ability to obey all the commandments?
2. Does strict obedience/disobedience honor the difference in ability?
3. Don't we have to have standards?
4. Isn't it reasonable that God would see things much more deeply than we would?

5. What if the deep mercy of God means that God's justice is deeper than ours?
6. What is the "reign of God" that was central to Jesus' mission?
7. What is the mission that Jesus gave to his followers? These followers were the Jesus movement that in due time became the church.
8. Could a church made up of only "proper" people carry out the mission we have received?
9. Could any one of us possibly be saved if it were not for the wonderful mercy that God is?
10. What do we want for someone we deeply love?
11. What should my response be to people who think that all I have written is not only wrong but dangerous?

Smile, God Loves You,
Father Clay

PS. The inspiration for this reflection is the book "Mercy" by Cardinal Walter Kasper. Pope Francis said about this book "This book has done me much good." A lot of these thoughts are my own and others are my understanding of what he has written. Don't blame him for my understandings. His book is the fruit of a long life as a very competent theologian.

PPS. I write as an active priest of 64 years. That gives me some insight but with the limitations of a person not formally trained in theology. My hope is that it will stimulate conversation about what it means to be church.